

**CITY OF BOULDER
OPEN SPACE BOARD OF TRUSTEES AGENDA ITEM**

MEETING DATE: July 9, 2008

AGENDA TITLE: Public hearing and consideration of a recommendation to the City Council on the IBM Trail Connector Community and Environmental Assessment Process (CEAP)

PRESENTER/S: Michael D. Patton, Director
Joe Mantione, Acting Division Manager Planning and Technical Services
Matt Jones, Environmental Planner

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The purpose of this item is for the Open Space Board of Trustees to make a final recommendation to City Council on the IBM Trail Connector Community and Environmental Assessment Process (CEAP).

The IBM Trail Connector is a multi-use trail within the city of Boulder that will connect the Boulder Reservoir trail system to the Cottontail Trail. This proposed regional trail is about one mile in length and will improve connectivity and safety between the Gunbarrel area and Boulder Reservoir.

An interdepartmental team completed the attached draft IBM Trail Connector CEAP report. The team is comprised of representatives from Open Space and Mountain Parks (OSMP), Parks and Recreation (Parks), Water Utilities (Utilities), Transportation, Planning, and Boulder County Transportation. The CEAP is used to determine the most viable and environmentally sound alternatives for completing the trail.

The proposed trail alternatives identified have been separated into three sections for evaluation purposes. The planning team developed and considered a total of nine trail alignments dispersed across zones A, B, and C. The preferred alignment is on Figure 5 of the draft CEAP report and the rationale for this recommendation is summarized below in the Analysis section. (Figures are located at the end of the draft CEAP document, Attachment A.) Issues being addressed in the CEAP include: bald eagles, prairie dogs, burrowing owls, water quality, Diagonal Highway (SH 119), railroad and 63rd Street crossings, Tom Watson Park ownership and management, Boulder Reservoir area recreation management and improved recreation and non-vehicle access.

This CEAP follows a multi-step process. The Parks and Recreation Board (PRAB) and Transportation Advisory Board (TAB) will each hold a public hearing to review and make a recommendation on the CEAP report to the Open Space Board of Trustees (OSBT). OSBT approves a preferred trail alternative because OSMP is the lead department for the project. The OSBT recommendation is informed by board, staff and the general public input. City council has the option to “call up” the CEAP, hold a public hearing and confirm or change OSBT’s recommendation. All three boards have been briefed on the process and offered preliminary feedback, and there have been two open house public meetings to gather input.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the OSBT approve the CEAP report including the preferred alignment.

ANALYSIS:

The draft IBM Trail Connector CEAP Report provides an analysis of alternatives considered and the rationale for the preferred alternative. A brief analysis of the preferred alignment for each zone of the connector trail is detailed below. (See Figures 4 and 5 near the end of Attachment A.)

Zone A - Trail alignment A1 is along the property line of OSMP land. This alignment, compared to A2, will minimize disruption to wildlife habitat and prairie dog colonies. It also provides a better opportunity for a neighborhood connection to the adjacent office park. Both alternatives use the current underpasses under Highway 119 and the railroad tracks.

Zone B - Trail alignment B3 is beyond the 200-meter bald eagle perch buffer. It would marginally increase wetland impacts, but would avoid having to acquire an additional access agreement from IBM.

Zone C - Trail alignment C4 would provide direct access to the Tom Watson Park trails and utilize an existing pedestrian crossing of 63rd Street to connect with the Boulder Reservoir trail system. Trail alignment C3 is a workable alternative that may be completed using an existing trail easement and does not involve Tom Watson Park. Transportation staff supports the crossing of 63rd Street along the C3 alignment as an interim crossing in case Tom Watson Park issues are not resolved prior to construction.

COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY ASSESSMENTS AND IMPACTS:

- **Economic:** The proposed trail would enhance the city's and county's transportation and recreation infrastructure, which is consistent with several elements of economic sustainability, including the provision of high levels of services and amenities and a highly desirable quality of life which contribute to the development of diverse and sustainable economic base.
- **Environmental:** The proposed trail would provide an opportunity for improved non-motorized access to outdoor recreation facilities and a decreased need for automobiles to access those facilities. Reducing vehicle miles traveled helps meet the goals of the Transportation Master Plan and Climate Action Plan.
- **Social:** The proposed trail project would improve individual mobility and health by providing transportation and recreation infrastructure that is free and equally accessible to all members of the community.

OTHER IMPACTS:

- **Fiscal:** Design and construction costs for the trail are paid for by a combination of federal and Boulder County funding. The county's \$920,000 federal Transportation Improvement Program grant requires July 2011 completion. Funding for long-term operating or management costs associated with the trail and possible trailhead at Tom Watson Park is not yet identified.
- **Staff time:** Staff time from several departments is required for the CEAP. Once constructed, agencies will be required to manage the trail facilities.

PUBLIC FEEDBACK:

- **Open houses** - Open houses were held on November 8, 2007 and May 5, 2008. Attendees generally expressed support for the trail connection. Issues included: other trail connections in the Gunbarrel area, Boulder Reservoir trail connections, equestrian parking and underpass height, potential conflicts within Tom Watson Park, insufficient parking at Coot Lake, potential impacts to Boulder Feeder Canal water quality, connection to FasTracks station west of 63rd, improved pedestrian/biker safety, and improved air quality via fewer car trips.
- **Parks and Recreation Advisory Board** – Issues mentioned at the March 31, 2008 and May 19, 2008 meetings: Tom Watson Park being used as a regional trailhead, long term ownership and management of Tom Watson Park and management of the Boulder Reservoir area, funding for visitor management, North 63rd Street crossing options and costs, construction while bald eagles are perching, prairie dogs, and the importance of the trail connection. In general, the PRAB was supportive of the trail connection. Additional information will be provided following the PRAB meeting.
- **Transportation Advisory Board** - Issues raised at April 14, 2008 and May 12, 2008 TAB meetings: prairie dog colony recovery, burrowing owl nest impacts and the ability to close the trail if needed based on biological opinions of nest proximity; the need to do wetland mitigation subject to city and federal rules; North 63rd Street crossing options and costs; plans to address concerns about potential impacts to water quality at Boulder Reservoir; timely resolution of ownership issues required to construct the preferred project alternative; clarification about whether or not Tom Watson and trail management plans must be in place prior to trail construction, and addressing the potential for FasTracks dual track railroad crossing.
- **Open Space Board of Trustees** - Issues raised at April 8, 2008 OSBT briefing meeting: ownership of Tom Watson Park, use of park drawing more people to the trail, North 63rd Street crossing options and issues, prairie dog management, use of OSMP staff time on the project, and the relatively tight trail project timeframe.

Submitted by:

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Joe Manton, Acting Division Manager Planning and Technical Services

Matt Jones, Environmental Planner

ATTACHMENTS:

- A: IBM Trail Connector Community and Environmental Assessment Process (CEAP) Report
(Due to the size of the electronic files, all Figures are located at the end of the CEAP Report.)
B: Transportation Advisory Board Cover Memo
C: Parks and Recreation Advisory Board Cover Memo